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MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: SOME TROUBLESOME
REALITIES AND POSSIBLE REMEDIES

By

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REMEDIES.*

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* This paper is based on a Keyonote Address delivered to the Management Education Division, Academy of Management, Aug. 13, 1984.

My interest in management education has a number of roots that have to be briefly reviewed in order to clarify my approach to this topic. Following my training as a social psychologist, I spent a number of years in the Army and was exposed at that time to the opportunity to study indoctrination methods used by the Chinese and North Koreans during the Korean conflict and on the mainland of China. This research resulted in the realization that a great deal of education is, in fact, socialization and indoctrination and that one must understand the dynamics of these processes in order to fully grasp the possible outcomes of an educational effort (Schein, 1961a, 1968).

The techniques of indoctrination used by the captors

turned out not to be very mysterious. What I came to call "coercive persuasion" was really a complex and total control of the social environment, a systematic control of communications, and a clever manipulation of group composition, incentives, rewards, and punishments. The same kinds of techniques were used for other ends in all kinds of institutions from the family to various kinds of schools.

It was not a very big leap, therefore, to begin my MIT research in the mid 1950's with the question of whether management education and development also relied on similar techniques of indoctrination (Schein 1961b). A number of best sellers had made just such an argument in response to what seemed like a proud stance on the part of some companies that they were teaching their new employees the company philosophy (Whyte, 1956).

Whyte chose to cast indoctrination in more negative terms, implying that it would produce a degree of conformity that would, at the minimum, be bad for the individual, and, in the end, be bad even for the company in that it would reduce the organization's innovative capacity if everyone were taught the same beliefs and values. Companies responded to this social pressure by de-emphasizing indoctrination and increasing their focus on management education instead.

My own research focused first on the effects of our own school on beliefs, attitudes, and values by studying three successive classes of regular masters students and Sloan Fellows when they first entered and just before graduation. The changes in their attitudes were compared to the relatively more fixed positions on these same attitudes of the faculty and of senior

executives who attended our programs (Schein, 1967). Not surprisingly, on those attitude areas where faculty and senior executives differed initially, the two student groups moved toward the faculty position and away from the position of their ultimate occupational reference group.

I could only presume that once these same people were out in various new organizations they would unlearn what they had learned at MIT and be socialized by the same techniques to the values of their employers. To study this process I launched three panels of students, 15 per year, to be measured before they graduated and again a year or more later.

One year out I found very little evidence of company indoctrination but a great deal of "reality shock," and adjustment difficulty to the realities of organizational life. When this group was approximately 10 years out of school I reinterviewed them again and found at this point evidence for what I came to call "career anchors," stable self-images derived from successive organizational learning experiences that expressed themselves as the self-perceived skills, motives, and values of the individual, and that functioned as guides and constraints on career choices (Schein, 1978, 1987).

Career anchors could not be identified when the person was still in graduate school. They were genuinely the product of what the person brought to the job situation and what actual experiences he or she had on the job. And the learning that led to stable self-images often took many years and many job experiences. Formal education was certainly an important

foundation for the career, but actual developmental experiences played at least as big a role in determining career outcomes.

Career anchors also highlighted individual differences. People made consistent choices, and, among the original panellists, there were at least five different patterns of career development visible. More recent research has expanded this to eight patterns: 1) Autonomous careers; 2) Security oriented careers; 3) Careers built on specific technical or functional skills; 4) Careers built to achieve general management positions; 5) Entrepreneurial careers; 6) Careers devoted to some cause or in the service of important values; 7) Careers built on pure challenge; and 8) Careers designed to permit the person to achieve a real integration of work, family, and personal issues (a certain life style) (Schein, 1985, 1987).

It is from this paradoxical twin focus--indoctrination on the one hand, and individual stability and difference, on the other hand, that I want to comment on management education. As I will argue, if one takes either the approach that the power is in the group and one can teach people anything one sets out to do, or that the power is in the individual and that one cannot really teach anyone anything that they are not already predisposed to learn, one will delude oneself. Only by keeping both perspectives in mind can one hope to understand the complexities and paradoxes of management education.

SOME TROUBLESOME REALITIES AND POSSIBLE REMEDIES

Reality No. 1: The occupation of "management" for which

we educate is, in fact, many different occupations involving different kinds of responsibilities, skills, and attitudes.

As the career anchor studies showed clearly, we have in organizational life different kinds of people whose entire career is devoted to different kinds of "goal jobs." There are those whose aim is to be 1) individual contributors, 2) project or program managers, 3) functional or staff managers, 4) general managers, 5) entrepreneurs, 6) self-employed businessmen or owners, 7) consultants, and/or 8) teachers of management.

The more one studies members of each of these groups the more different they appear to be, yet all of them have had some type of management education.

I find that most business school programs and most of what I read about what a management education should be absolutely ignores this reality, or attempts to deny it by vague claims that management is management wherever you find it. Or the more harmful evasion is to glorify some of these occupational roles, to make heroes out of the general manager or the entrepreneur, and to ignore the others as if they contributed less or were merely stepping stones to the heroic roles.

But the era where the general manager is the key resource may be passing. More and more companies are recognizing how dependent they are on their functional managers, their individual contributors, and their technical staff. Yet little thinking has been devoted to the kind of education that would enhance those particular managerial occupations. In fact, we muddy the waters when we encourage our best technical talent to

move into supervisory roles in order to get more money or a promotion, and when we keep our general manager potential candidates in functional "stove pipes" for too many years of their career.

We have no system for differentiating the educational process to meet the future needs of people who will, in fact, be in very different occupations partly because we do not really acknowledge in the first place the reality of those occupational differences.

Some possible remedies

1. Systematic alumni surveys to define more clearly the kind of work that different managerial occupations have to do. Every business and management school should do systematic alumni surveys to find out what the full range of occupations is to which their alumni have gravitated. The goal should not be how well they are doing, but what they are doing.

One should also find out how managerial work will change in the future to reflect technological, economic, political, and socio-cultural realities. Only when we understand clearly the nature of different kinds of managerial work can we undertake a sensible examination of our curricula to determine whether we are educating appropriately or not.

2. Management committees to define more clearly what the future employers of our graduates need in the way of human resources. Every school should create review committees consisting of some senior managers, entrepreneurs, and technical/functional staff members to analyze the changing nature of the

business and managerial scene and to inform the school on the changing needs of the employers.

I would not trust the faculty judgment to second guess the future, though if some faculty members are particularly able in this area, I would put them on such committees. On the other hand, I have been impressed by how much bolder and farseeing some of our alumni and members of our visiting committees have been than members of our own school.

Most faculty members I have met neither know much about nor care much about the vicissitudes of their student's careers and what the future needs of society may be. They tend to stay in touch with those few students who have become superstars in the faculty member's speciality, and then promote a curriculum that would produce more such superstars, never noticing that their favorite alumni might be a distinct minority in the total occupational picture. This reality suggests a third part of the remedy.

3. Invent mechanisms to systematically expose the faculty to the insights of the outside review committees and to the results of the occupational surveys. It is not enough to generate new insights on what has happened to our alumni and what our committees may perceive to be happening in the future. We have in our ivory towers a remarkable capacity to ignore relevant data if it would make us uncomfortable. I have noticed especially vis-a-vis senior managers that many faculty members are inherently uncomfortable in their contacts with them, even to the point of feeling threatened by them. We therefore need to invent

mechanisms that expose faculty not only to the information gathered by review committee but that create a genuine dialogue with such committees.

One mechanism would be to put faculty members on such review committees as part of their regular work assignments. Another mechanism would be to have strategy or planning reviews for departments or the whole school and to have presentations at such reviews by members of the outside review committees. A third mechanism would be to have alumni invite faculty members into their places of work to do seminars or to engage in discussions of the relevance of the faculty member's field to what is going on in organizations.

To summarize thus far, I have argued that the alumni of business and management schools enter a wide variety of occupations and that ways must be found to understand those occupations so that we can test whether our curricula are, in fact, relevant or not. This point is closely related to another assumption that leads to reality number two.

Reality Number 2. Management is not, has never been, and probably should not ever be a "profession" in the sociological sense of what a profession is.

Labelling oneself a profession brings status and prestige in society so there is a tendency for all occupations to aspire to be a profession or at least to claim to be one. But the study of the traditional professions of medicine, law, the ministry, and the many younger professions such as accounting,

pharmacy, social work, etc. reveals that professions have a number of common characteristics that do not fit the general management model at all (Schein, 1968).

There are no formal educational requirements for entry into management, there is no system of accreditation or licensing for managers, managers do not have clearly defined clients in the way that most professions have (they have multiple client systems whose needs are in fact in conflict with each other, e.g. stockholder, customers, subordinates, supervisors, and the broader community), there is no clear code of ethics associated with the occupation and enforced by peer review, and there is no commonly agreed upon body of knowledge that is recognized as the essence of what is needed in order to be a manager (Schein, 1966, 1968, 1972).

In fact, it may well be that the essence of management is to do precisely what the professions cannot do, to be the all purpose integrating function in social systems, to bring together the effort of various specialty interests into a coherent set of actions devoted to the achievement of some complex goal. This process of integration may well be as complex and varied as the myriad of tasks that face the myriad kinds of social systems and organizations that we find.

To put it another way, management may ultimately be the process of putting things together to achieve a goal within time, budget, and other kinds of constraints, a purposive "generalist" kind of process that uses any and all means available. Management is putting resources together, making things happen, achieving

results, not the application of deep and esoteric knowledge on behalf of a client. Professions have clearly specified clients whereas management must balance and integrate the needs and aspirations of many stakeholder whose short-run interests are typically in conflict with each other.

If this is so, what does it tell us about how to prepare people for managerial roles? Can an educational process even do this, or must the real training for general management occur in the context of development throughout the early years of the career following school? For example, in the traditional professions it is often possible to simulate during school the essence of what the professional will be doing later. If accountability for goal achievement is an essential characteristic of management, can this be simulated during school? Can students be made to feel genuinely accountable for something, or does the fact that something is simulated take out of the experience its most essential attribute?

What kind of metaphor should schools develop for the management process that would enable them to think clearly about educating future managers? I would suggest that to think of management as an "art" or a "craft" would be more accurate than to think of it as a profession. This is certainly more congruent with how senior level managers describe their own experiences, and if we think of what it takes to be a good artist or craftsman, we find that relevant models of the educational process can be identified.

First of all a good artist must have highly developed

knowledge related to his or her medium. The painter must know about color and color mixing and the technical properties of his paints, canvases, or papers. The potter must know about the chemistry of clay and glazes and the effects of different kinds of firing processes. The sculptor must know about wood, or stone, or clay, and so on. Good artists have a great deal of formal knowledge.

Second, the good artist must have extraordinary technical skills that come only with training and practice. Often such training occurs during long periods of apprenticeship during which more senior artists or talented teachers provide coaching, guidance, and feedback. The period of formal education can only help to identify talent. It typically cannot do much to develop the talent.

Third, the good artist must have something to say. We see this expressed today in the management and leadership literature under concepts such as "vision" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985), or being a corporate "pathfinder" (Leavitt, 1986). We see it inside organizations in the employee's often stated lament that the boss does not send clear signals or does not really articulate the goals or mission of the organization. Managers who are clear about what they want and where they are going are often viewed as "better" bosses.

One cannot overlook, of course, the limitation of the metaphor. The artist is often a lone creator, whereas the manager is by definition an organization person, tied to the mission and goals of the employing institution. Nevertheless, within the

broad framework of that mission, managers have a great deal of freedom and license to pursue the goals in their own way, and the artistry is often in the ability to innovate while still being part of the system. How can we educate for this "reality?"

Some Guidelines.

1. Identify the knowledge base needed, the underlying technical core of all management processes, i.e. what every future manager will need to know regardless of which of the many occupations he may end up in. I would propose that we re-examine the content core of our curricula and decide with the help of alumni and the outside committees suggested above, what the essential areas of knowledge are that all potential managers must have.

For example, I would hypothesize that 1) economics, finance, and accounting and 2) the psychology and sociology of organizations would be intrinsic to all of the occupations identified, but that marketing, production, strategy, quantitative methods, statistics, management information and control, and law would not be. Remember, I am not now asking our current faculties for their opinion. Each of them could convincingly justify their field. I am asking alumni and outside committees to provide this opinion based on their perspective from being in the relevant occupations.

In this regard, let me speculate on the future. If the trend toward the internationalization of business continues and if the organization of the future will either be a multi-cultural

global organization or will be involved in cross-cultural joint ventures, then knowledge of other languages may well become intrinsic to all management. We may well find that management students should not only learn another language, but, more importantly, should learn how to learn in the cross-cultural context--how to pick up the essentials of another language and another culture quickly and efficiently.

2. Increase training for self-insight, pro-activity, and the taking of responsibility. Having identified the knowledge base, one should next ask what the educational process can do to help people to acquire the technical skills and to come into contact with what they have to say. For this purpose they need self-insight, skills in self-analysis and self-study, and practice in exercising managerial functions. Even though one cannot simulate the essence of the managerial role, one can provide opportunities to practice the various skills needed and provide opportunities to become acquainted with one's own talents, motives and values.

To facilitate this kind of educational process we clearly need experiential methods that provide students with opportunities to take a stand, to exercise some responsibility, to put their neck on the line, to find out what makes them tick, how they feel about other people, about power, and about influence and manipulation (Schein & Bennis, 1965; Beckhard, 1969; Bennis, 1969).

Have we done all we can in our curricula to give our students opportunity to exercise real responsibility? I believe

that we need to rethink the case method, group projects, and management games to determine whether they put the student into a position of really having to put himself on the line, where failure leads not merely to a lower grade but has some real personal consequences.

Students who have real responsibilities are the ones who edit the school's management journal, who run concessions for the school, who work on student/faculty committees, and who have to be representatives of other students on projects or in various governance functions. Can we provide such experiences to a broader base of students and can we invent other realistic tasks to give more students such opportunities? The difficulty of designing such experiences and the lack of consensus across different groups within the school on how to educate reflects the third reality.

Reality Number 3. We do not really understand the nature of learning and development.

Ever since McGregor pointed out the difference between developmental models based on the "engineering" analogy, where we fashion, mold, and tool human raw material on our educational lathes, and "agricultural" models, where we sow the human seed, provide fertilizer, water, and sunshine, and then prune, shape and ultimately harvest the human product, there has been confusion both in the schools and in career development programs about what education and development really are (McGregor, 1966).

With these two models we revisit the dilemma I started

with. Are we really talking about indoctrination, molding people to fit the needs of organizations and occupations, or are we really talking about self-development, enabling people to fulfill their potential, whether or not this fits them for any given job or organization. Or, at a deeper level, are we talking about nature or are we talking about nurture.

Obviously this issue can only be resolved by noting that effective educational processes take both models into account and seek to integrate them. The individual has a range of potential, but this potential will not become actual unless there are opportunities for it to develop, and those opportunities ultimately reflect the social and occupational priorities of any given society at any given time. If one wants to enhance such integration, how can an educational institution help?

Some remedial suggestions.

1. Teach students how to learn about themselves. One of the greatest sources of difficulty for people in their efforts to fulfill their potential is that they do not know themselves well enough to know what they could and should aspire to. Students generally do not know during their school years (even if they have been out a few years prior to returning to graduate school), what the shape of their managerial career will ultimately look like and what their own[✓] talents and aspirations[✓] really are. It will take them 5 to 10 years or more before it becomes clear to them what their career anchors really are.

But during their school years they can begin a process

of self-study and self-analysis that will be essential to continue once they are out in the world of work. ✓ In other words they need to learn how to learn about themselves. They need to learn theories about occupational and career development, theories of adult development, psychodynamic models, and the skills of self-observation and self-analysis.

For example, in my classes I typically ask each student to start a private diary focused on what he or she is feeling and observing, what the sources of anger, frustration, and anxiety are, what causes elation and joy, what events arouse feelings of success or failure, what is a viable learning goal, what changes are desired, and so on. My goal is to get students to discover what their own patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting are, and to have records so that they can compare past patterns with present ones.

I also have students write short weekly papers about themselves, emphasizing the process of learning to observe human behavior, especially one's own behavior, in a dispassionate and scientific fashion. I want students to get in touch with their own perceptual filters, with their taken for granted assumptions, their stereotypes that bias perceptions, their automatic and unexamined emotional responses (Schein, 1987b).

2. Provide the best possible teaching, regardless of particular teaching method or style. Since we do not really know how people learn, and since it is likely that different people learn in different ways (Kolb, 1983), we need not worry too much about identifying the "right" way to teach any given subject

matter, but we do need to insure that every faculty member is as good as he or she can be.

Hall and I asked students to identify teachers from whom they learned a great deal, and then had them describe those teachers on a great many adjective dimensions. Factor analyses of these dimensions revealed what Adelson (1961) and others had said, that good teachers come in several different modes. We found the self-centered, shamanistic, charismatic teacher who was characterized best by the adjective "potency;" we found the brilliant, subject centered naturalists who were best characterized by "competence" and "knowledgability;" and we found the student centered, friendly mystic best characterized by the adjective "supportive" (Schein & Hall, 1967).

Regardless of teaching style or method, the good teacher seems to come through, and the only consistent complaint we get from students is about "poor" teaching, not particular teaching styles. If we take this point seriously it leads to the next remedy.

3. Develop and run workshops on teaching for all faculty members. My own experience with seminars and workshops on teaching is that they work, but that you cannot force people into them. They are intrinsically threatening. Only when the teacher gets feedback through the normal channels that he or she is not doing as well with students as they should be, or as they would like, is there a chance to motivate them to work on their teaching skill systematically.

The technology of such workshops is simple. The group

discusses live samples of teaching by its own members, preferably audio or video taped, though that itself can be too threatening at the outset. The discussion focuses on shared reactions to different teaching behaviors, but lets the judgment of what is good and bad remain with the person who produced the teaching sample. Each participant must obtain self-insight, learn what kinds of things work for him or her, and what kinds of things do not work. The group is there to provide feedback and gentle coaching, not judgment or evaluation, so that each person can learn to build on his or her own strengths.

A Final Reality. Though the world needs more leaders and entrepreneurs, we do not know how to identify or educate such people.

Everyone these days is calling for visionary leadership, for entrepreneurship, for creativity and innovation in organizations and society, but the truth is that we know next to nothing about how to identify and select people with such qualities, and we know even less about how to educate and develop such people.

Yet schools can show with pride what a high percentage of their alumni have achieved leadership positions, implying that they created such leaders. What is overlooked in this argument is that people with leadership potential know how to select the right schools that will give them the kind of education and credentials that they are seeking. In other words, schools do not select future leaders, but future leaders do select schools. What

schools can do, then, is to become as attractive as possible to people with high leadership potential and to offer them an enriching curriculum.

If schools claim to teach people "leadership" or "entrepreneurship" they may be guilty of false advertising, but if they claim to enhance and enrich those people who already have the talent for such roles, they may be doing society a great service. How might this be implemented?

What to do.

1. Develop broader, enriched curricula. I propose that we deliberately enrich our curricula with more humanities and social sciences to attract and stimulate those students who have the motivation and the capacity to lead. Whether or not we call such courses "leadership development," matters less than the actual content which must be designed to enlarge the student's perspective and provide the raw material from which visions are made. There is a special role for history courses, courses in philosophy and ethics, courses in economic and political development, courses in international relations, and, most important, courses in anthropology to get across the richness of cross-cultural understanding.

Many of our curricula are totally technocractic. They teach techniques to a fault, but teach the student nothing about when to use them, how to use them, and/or, most important, whether or not to use them at all from an ethical/moral point of view. For example, very few students gain any appreciation of the fact

that information and control systems have moral implications, and that the introduction of information technology via elaborate computerized systems permits senior executives to have access to all kinds of information that not only potentially makes operations more efficient but also may have secondary moral implications in exposing areas of work that may be regarded by subordinates as "private." What is the moral message implicit in a system in which there is no longer any private area of responsibility, and what, in fact, does such a system do to the fundamental concept of "sense of responsibility" that is so crucial in management? Leaders must understand these issues and make wise choices around them.

2. Revise classroom accounting schemes to permit students more choice of small seminars. In order to enrich the curriculum, it is necessary to rethink the accounting logic that says that "classes that attract less than x number of students do not belong in the curriculum." If only five students sign up, but those five are the highest potential leaders in the school, should we cancel that seminar or should we be thrilled that good students want to take it? It seems to me one cannot have an enriched curriculum without an array of small seminars that attract the best students precisely because they are small and interesting.

Every faculty member should have the right and obligation to develop a small elective seminar to get into the interesting issues, and these should not be limited as they often have been to doctoral students where the research emphasis dominates. Some of the most exciting courses I have taught have

been to 10 to 15 regular masters level students on topics such as "Influence, Persuasion, and Attitude Change," "Adult socialization and career development," "Planned change and organization development," and "Leadership" (a course taught entirely through the use of commercial films, involving a class project in which groups had to make brief training films of their own). The last mentioned course was co-taught with Warren Bennis and was not the least bit "cost effective," but the alumni of that course still speak of it as one of the most significant educational experiences of their entire two year program.

In summary, what we need to do is to make our curricula more exciting and attractive. Instead of looking for cost effective standardization, we need to supplement what we define as the essential core referred to above with an extensive cafeteria of courses, workshops, seminars, and other educational activities that would attract good students and stimulate faculty creativity. Education ultimately works best when teachers are excited about what they are doing. Can we put excitement back into management education?

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